

# Globalization and Cultural Changes

**Mirela ARSITH**  
**University of Bacău, Bacău, ROMANIA**

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**Abstract:** Globalization ceases being perceived as a potential cause for the loss of identity, for the reaching of a standard model, if accepted as part of identity, as *field identity* (Solomon Marcus, 2005) of a predominantly interactive kind. Thus, one should accept the existence of difference and should come to the idea that one's own identity can be fully understood only through the concept of alterity. An idea which cannot be easily taken in, as the consciousness of identity is stronger than that of being related to the other, and besides, the mentality that the other is an opponent is yet rather common.

Our approach is based on the qualitative methodology which offers the tools and strategies of studying the social facts and of understanding the reasons for their being the way they happen.

The hypothesis of our research starts from the idea that cultural changes come out of the need of raising the ability of understanding one's life and the world one lives in. For the time being, cultural change have been manifesting themselves within the phenomenon of globalization, which, as modality of interaction with the whole world has always been a fact. It is only because of the process speeding us that we have become aware of globalization. Among the fundamental concepts, globalization operates with, there can be mentioned: identity, culture, cultural change(s), heritage, (national) specificity.

Anthony Giddens, J. E. Stiglitz, Thomas Friedman, Mark Taylor, Yves Brunsvick, André Danzin are only some authors who studied globalization, revealing its opposite dimensions: global or national features, homogeneity and discrimination, integration and fragmentation, centralization and decentralization.

The metamorphoses of the present world ask for the replacing of the representation of a people's identity as being circumscribed to a set of invariable values throughout time by a new representation of identity, based on historicity and cultural change. Globalization implies the carrying out and the taking in of some specific cultural changes perceived as transformations produced at the level of behavioural patterns and of symbolic systems pertaining to a national community, respectively to family and social life, to religious, economic life, or to consumption.

To our opinion, globalization is neither good, nor bad, neither dangerous, nor efficient in an ideal world.

All these attributes are but the traits of behavioural and attitudinal models of the act(ion)s and projects of all those involved in this complex process which has become stronger and stronger in nowadays' society.

## 1. The multidimensional feature of globalization

The concept of *globalization* embodies the more complex and wide web of interconnections and interdependences that describe the modern social life. “Nowadays, the goods, the capital, people, knowledge, images, crime, pollution, drugs, models and beliefs, all of them easily spread beyond territorial borders. Nets, social movement and transnational relations may be extended in all the areas...”<sup>1</sup>. The suggested relations resign in: from institutionalized social relations (widely spread) between people and communities from the whole world, to the “stream” of goods, information, people, social and cultural manifestations, beyond national borders or to the “real” ways of connecting, given by the technological innovations.<sup>2</sup>

The globalization phenomena are complex and multidimensional, forcing for resize and transparency of the conceptual frames through which we see the social world.

People approach the study of globalization from the perspective of some stereotypes of thinking based especially on different informational principles; this fact makes them reject complexity and follow the relative simplicity of some basic concepts (capitalism, nationalism, nation-state etc.). Usually, this formulas are meant to represent globalization in a wrong way, because complexity is lost and the phenomenon itself is disintegrated.

In scientific works as well as in peripheral literature, a minimal agreement can be identified concerning the empirical reality globalization refers to: multiple connections that nowadays link our practices, our experiences and our political, economical and ecological destiny, in the whole modern world. Thus, *the globalization theory* assumes its role of emphasizing both the sources of this connection and the interpretation of its implications.

The idea of connection implies an increased spatial-global proximity; the discourse of globalization abounds in metaphors of proximity, of “*the smaller world*”: from the famous Marshall McLuhan’s “global village” to the recent recognition of the expression “our global neighbourhood”, used by the United Nations to describe the birth of a new international politic context.

Concerning the globalization processes, many theoreticians have used the term *detritorialization*. This concept should catch the novelty of the contemporary transformation of the region, emphasizing both the positive and the negative aspects, without interpreting it only as a mere drying or dissolution of the cultural interaction. The globalization of the practical experience may determine the feeling of losing “local” cultural identity, as long as our daily lives mingle more and more with foreign influences and experiences.

As long as a reason concerning globalization is that it stands for a speeding process, we must take into consideration the context of “the world events” developing very fast. Many of unpredictable changes, being connected to the wide process of globalization, being caused by globalization and equally bringing its contribution to it: Cernobil and its

<sup>1</sup> A. McGrew, “A Global Society ?” in S. Hall, D. Held și A. McGrew (editori), *Modernity and its Futures*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1992, p. 64

<sup>2</sup> The term of globalization was for the first time used by Theodore Levitt, in his work *Globalization and Markets*. Thus, in the '80, the term of globalization stood for technological progress that made the international transactions more easier and faster. As well, it stood for the extension beyond the national borders of the same market forces that had been working at all the levels of the economic activity for centuries. One of the most used definitions of concept of globalization is R. Robertson’s in his work *Globalization*, where he emphasizes: “*Globalization is the complex process of the multiplication of the connection and interconnections between the states forming the world system.*” ( R.Robertson, *Globalization*, Sage Publishing House, London, 1992, p. 50). Some critics consider that globalization is nothing else but an Americanization process. In his work “Lexus și măslinul” Thomas Friedman writes: “ globalization means in fact Americanization; globalization has Mickey Mouse’s ears, drinks Pepsi or Coca Cola, eats Big Macs, uses IBM laptops. Many countries see it as something good, but others consider it a fundamental threat.” (Th. Friedman, *Lexus și măslinul*, Editura Fundației PRO, București, 2001, p. 400).

metaphorical and media “explosion”, the fall of The Wall of Berlin and the collapse of the communist world, the tendency to achieve a more compact European union, represented by the Maastricht Treaty and the European currency, the high level meetings on the topic of the pollution and climatic changes, the wars of Beirut, Golf, Somalia, Bosnia, Rwanda - all of them developing in front of the eyes of the people with increased technical briefing and “snapshots”. Such global events are connected to the cultural experience of the deterritorialization at least in two ways. First of all, some of them will have direct effects upon the immediate material environment and upon the material conditions of people.

For example, the agreements of the European Union may have an impact – positive or negative – upon the work process of the small local business, or the regional development markets of the European Union may transform the local newly developed areas into stagnant urban fields. The way in which the citizens feel these interventions, either as an inopportune interference and as a threat upon their way of life or as a promise to achieve a new and rather vague European identity and to be part of a “community” project, will determine the way in which they will turn it into their benefit or in the contrary they will not take advantages of the new situation. Concerning the European legislative impact, the experience of the past determinations may be linked to some international political/economic processes very well known, and to its protagonists and the identifiable centers of leadership. (for example the “eurocrats” of Brussels).

From a wider cultural perspective, we may say that in the beginning, globalization satisfied the expansion of the ways of life and of the occidental values. Nowadays it is hard to be given the globalization a certain direction.

Generally speaking, the events as those mentioned above may participate to the extension of the man’s “phenomenal world”: people get to frequently consider the foreign events and processes, taking into consideration those aspects significant for their own lives.

Whichever the causal and practical significance of these phenomena would be, there is no doubt that one of the most involving form of globalization is the cultural one. The complexity of the cultural interactions between premodern and modern societies was overpassed by the more intense prevailing of images and symbols and of the extraordinary variety of the ways of thinking and of communicating specific to the last decades.

## 2. The concept of *globalization* in the cultural field

Globalization, as a way of interacting with the wide world, has always existed. Only the speeding up of this process has determined our awareness. The fundamental concepts used in paradigm of globalization are: identity, culture, cultural change, (national) heritage etc.

After the fall of Rome and of the Han Dynasty in China and after the first wave of Islamic expansion, empires continued to rise and fall. The great emperors were nomad warriors from the Eurasian steppes. But their cultural innovations did not overcome their military talent. Their campaigns and their conquests led to the reconsidering of the old cultural models and not their transformation. Before the Modern Age, *“world religions and empires offered the most important cultural and institutional complexes that made the cultural interaction and long distance communication possible and through which strong and extended cultural interacting relations might prevail. Trade was a key-vehicle for this spreading of ideas and of artifacts on long distances.”*<sup>3</sup>

Even where the strategy failed from the perspective of building up the empire, there was the possibility that it might leave behind a distinctive cultural heritage. For example,

<sup>3</sup> D. Held, A. McGrew, D. Goldblatt, J. Perraton, *Transformări globale. Politică, economie și cultură*, Editura „Polihrom”, București, 2004, p. 385

the ephemeral Macedonian Empire of Alexander the Great had been the essence for the spreading of Greek language, science, philosophy and Greek literature in the Middle East. *“Even though cultures had relations with other cultures, and religions with other religions, the contacts had not always been fruitful. The regional feature of world religions reflects border lines and discrepancies between them and the empires they encountered. Even more, hardly did most of the people understand those great cultural interactions – the identities, the beliefs and rituals were mostly local. Between the village and the great empires there were very few cultural exchanges”*<sup>4</sup>.

European empires will finally become efficient instruments of the cultural power abroad Europe, especially due to birth of nationalism and of nation-states in Europe and in both Americas, starting with the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Inside this area, there had been gradually redefined complex models of cultural streams between aristocrats, as well as the distinctive area of the local folk features. More and more cultural institutions and cultural streams got to set their place between the borders of the forming nation-states.

Language, school, means of transportation and communication, liturgical ritual and identity, all had been defined more and more from the perspective of the nations territorially bordered. External or foreign influences were rejected or treated in a suspicious and hostile manner. But, in Occident, the cosmopolitanism and the internationalism continued to exist, as well as the transnational cultural practices and institutions.

Indeed, from the heart of the European system of the nation-states *“ideologies and secular strong discourses had arisen – liberalism, Marxism and modern science – whose rationalism from Enlightenment suggested, entitled or not, the attraction and the universal applicability. Still, generally, nationalism was the one that became the most powerful cultural force, partly because it was systematically and financial supported and displayed by the modern states”*<sup>5</sup> According to this interpretation, the climax of cultural globalization is placed in the past, while the most powerful and significant cultural streams and relations developed between the borders of the modern nation-states.

Globalization changes the way in which we conceptualize culture, because culture has been localized for a very long time in a certain space. Does global modernism promise to offer us a global culture? In a certain way it might be said that such a culture already exists. As Ulf Hannerz writes, *“today there is a world culture, but it advisable to understand what it means. The total homogeneity of the expressional and signifying systems has not taken place yet and there is no probability to be seen very soon. But the world has become a net of social relations and, between its various regions, there is a movement of meanings similar to the movement of people and goods.”*<sup>6</sup>

The Romanian philosopher Constantin Noica said that, unlike a loaf of bread that might come to divide men, *“value unifies them, makes them a whole”*. In the same time, *“value gathers people and it preserves itself in its movement, unlike the goods, that divide and perish in themselves through consuming”*<sup>7</sup>

The integration context of the cultural practices and experiences into the web, world wide, may be seen as a global culture. This meaning must be separated from the one according to which global culture is understood as a unique and homogenized signifying system. Global culture *“is like the birth of a single culture, gathering all the people in the world and replacing the diversity of cultural systems used before.”*<sup>8</sup>. Obviously, such a culture has not appeared yet.

Of course, the idea of a global culture has not become possible only in the days of global modernism. The great cultural texts could overpass the linguistic, political, civil and cultural

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p.386

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>6</sup> U. Hannerz, *Cosmopolitans and Locals in World Culture*, Featherstone, Londra, 1990, p. 237.

<sup>7</sup> Constantin Noica, *Modelul cultural European*, Editura „Humanitas“, București, 1993, p.60

<sup>8</sup> J. Tomlinson, *Globalizare și cultură*, Editura Amarcord, Timișoara, 2002, p. 105.

borders provided that they should be translated into the languages of the interested cultural communities. But, during the centuries, the process has been delayed by the geographic distances, by the slowness of traveling or by technical difficulties.

We must point out that in this context, Europe does not represent a culture among the others; *“Europe has educated and it is still educating the world, as itself had discovered the rest of the world, and not the rest of the world discovered it”*<sup>9</sup>

Along with the development of globalization, made possible by media and the contemporary means of transportation, the movements of the texts (religious, political, literary, scientific ideas) has speeded up. Nothing could stop people to travel or the development of communications (parabolic TV antennas, video tapes, Internet), so the circulation of ideas and opinions. We enter the age of the generalized mixture of cultures and civilizations, of discourses and passions.

Cultural globalization *“stands not only for empirical human contacts between civilizations (the revolution of the means of transportation), and also for the intellectual instruments of mediation between groups put together in more or less brutal manner”*<sup>10</sup>, such as History, Philology, Linguistics, Archeology, Sociology, Philosophy etc.

In the attempt of creating a global culture, speaking some world wide spread languages has an important role. Undoubtedly, in the top of the hierarchy is English language, used in the whole world, in all its forms: written, spoken, formal, informal, and also in its functional styles: economical, juridical, technical, journalistic. It became the central language of international communication in the business, political, administrative, scientific and academic area, in the same time being the dominant language used in global advertising and popular culture. The main language used in IT is English being the written code for Windows and Internet protocols. *“More than two thirds of the scientists in the world write in English, three quarters of the international mail are written in English and 80% of the information of the recovering systems of world electronic data are stocked in English”*<sup>11</sup>.

The use of a language is tightly connected to the rhythms of power. *“English is the mother language of the two hegemonic superpowers of the modern world, Great Britain and USA. Even more, this power is used in all the fields of human life: economical, political, military and last, but not least, cultural.”*<sup>12</sup> The problem of the domination of one language and the threat upon the linguistic diversity is connected to another more general problem, that of the cultural imperialism: the idea that a culture may be a hegemonic one.

This pessimistic construction of the idea of global culture was very popular at the end of 20<sup>th</sup> century. Indeed, the theory of the cultural imperialism may be considered one of the earliest theories of cultural globalization. This concept of global culture is seen today as a popularization of the values, goods and American style of life. . In his work *“Lexus și măslinul”* Thomas Friedman writes: *“Today globalization has Mickey Mouse’s ears, drinks Pepsi or Coca Cola, eats Big Macs, uses an IBM laptop... In most of the countries, people no longer can make the distinctin between the American power, American exports, amrican cultural assaults, American cultural exports and the real face of globalization”*<sup>13</sup>. The best proof to support this affirmation is the convergence and the standardization obvious in the cultural products in the whole world. *“Take any catalogue, from clothes to music, to film and television, and to architecture and you could not ignore the fact that*

<sup>9</sup> Constantin Noica, *op. cit.*, p. 30

<sup>10</sup> G. Leclerc, *Mondializarea culturală. Civilizațiile puse la încercare*, Editura Știința, Chișinău, 2003, p.238

<sup>11</sup> D. Crystal, *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language*, Cambridge Univeristy Press, 1987, p. 358.

<sup>12</sup> D.Held, A.McGrew, D.Goldblatt, J.Perraton, *op.cit.*, p. 391.

<sup>13</sup> Th.L. Friedman , *Lexus și măslinul, Cum să înțelegem globalizarea*, Editura Fundației PRO, București, 2001, p. 400.

*some styles, brands, tastes and practices now have global circulation and can be found almost anywhere in this world.*<sup>14</sup>

Considering the presence of such global goods as a symbol of convergence to capitalist monoculture, means reducing culture to its material goods, and this fact stands for a narrowing and an obvious convergence of the cultural experience. The aspects of the cultures individually perceived felt and interpreted in different contexts and local traditions lead to consolidation of cultures.

Another way of interpreting global culture consists in the emphasizing of the need of historical recuperation of these non-occidental cultural traditions. Indeed, this is what can be found in *A Dictionary of Global Culture*, in which Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates (1998) bring items that rebalance global cultural representation, counterbalancing the supremacy of occidental figures and themes. Next to Toussaint's *L'Ouverture* Martin Luther appears, next to Shakespeare, the king Zulus Shaka.

But this dictionary does not remove the persistent suspicions concerning occidental cultural domination. These suspicions appear in the title of a book written by Serge Latouche, a French political economy specialist, who brings a serious accusation to occidentalization as "*a tendency to planetary uniformity*" and "*a international standardization of the ways of life*"<sup>15</sup>. And J. Tomlinson considers that when we talk about occidentalization, we obviously refer to the spread of European languages, especially English and of the mercantile culture, but also to "*fashion, to gastronomy, musical and architectural formulas, to a type of cultural expression ruled by media, to a group of philosophical ideas and a set of values and cultural attitudes.*"<sup>16</sup>.

### **3. Interventions of the cultural changes in the global processes**

Globalization changes the context of the meaning building. This fact means the transformation of the human being's "worlds"; the feeling of identity is modified and so are man's relations with the space. The redimensioning of the culture influences and transforms the understanding, the values, the wishes, the behavior, the ideals and the myths that initially dominated the local "world" of the every day experience. Communication, flexibility and connection are the centre of our living.

The dynamic and the metamorphosis of the present world determine the replacement of the representation of the identity of a nation being influenced by a set of invariable values with a new one upon identity, based on historicity and cultural change. Culture may be understood as a field of the existence in which people create the meaning through the practices of the symbolical representation and their communication. The economic field means the ways in which people produce, change and consume material goods, the political field is made of the ways of distribution and usage of the power inside the societies.

It is important to understand that all these are "dimensions" of the social life and not distinctive activity fields: people do not pass from "making economy" to "creating culture" as they are changing the daily work into relaxing activities. If this is the reality, no meaning of the economic activities will be identified. But still this way of thinking is deeply involved in the general perspectives upon culture, that implies the practices and products of art, literature, music, films etc. All these are important forms through which particular meanings are generated, but they cannot exclusively define the cultural dimension.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> J. Tomlinson, *op.cit.*, p.120.

<sup>15</sup> S. Latouche, *The Westernization of the World*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1996, p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> J. Tomlinson, *op.cit.*, p.129.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, p.32

The paradigm of globalization requires the achievement and the acceptance of some cultural changes perceived as modifications of the behavioral models and of the symbolical systems of a national community, including the social and family life, the mass consumption, the economical perspectives, the religious life.

Globalization is no longer perceived as a potential cause of losing identity, of standardization, if it is accepted as part of identity, as *field identity* of a predominant interactive kind “*that necessarily and happily rounds up the substance identity and the structural identity*”<sup>18</sup>. Thus, we have to get to the difference acceptance and to the belief that self identity might be totally understood only through otherness. “*Nowadays the value is established only at a global level. What does the value of a scientist or a writer mean? The first answer is: the sum of the others’ reactions given his work*”<sup>19</sup> This goal is hard to achieve, because the identity understanding is stronger than the relationship established with *the other*, and the idea that *the other* is an opponent is still very popular.

According to Solomon Marcus, all the subjects had their period of developing a certain specific feature and a relative autonomy. Nowadays, the subjects discovered in their internal structure profound reasons to interact with the other subjects. “*The identity achieved by a every subject had become a premise of its metabolism with the others, an indispensable relation for the normal functioning of the culture.*”<sup>20</sup> This is what cultural change means.

Cultural changes have important results, in the extent of the way in which the forming of the meaning, the cultural signification and interpretation determine individual and collective actions that have their own consequences. Thus, in certain occurrences, the decision of eating or not (in the case of fast or diet) is a cultural one. Also, the codes and differences in fashion establish the individual and cultural identity. The slogan of the ecologic movement “*Think globally, act locally*” suggests a political strategy, justified by a certain cultural narrative, that illustrates what a “good living” means.

Many times, the “local” actions with a cultural base may have globalization consequences, taking part at the functioning of the institutions, strongly connected to the structural-institutional features of the social through reflectivity. Thus, globalization implies at least the possibility of local intervention in the global processes. “*Precisely this reflexive sensibility of the institution upon the human agents’ contribution points out the specific dynamic of the modern social life and defines the connection between the numerous local individual actions and the global structures and processes at an upper level.*”<sup>21</sup> English teenagers’ choosing of clothes may determines the hiring of more Romanian workers. In the same time, the implied connection is that these options may have global ecological consequences as for wool, linen and other natural resources used, also for the implied production activities.

More and more, globalization becomes a cultural dimension in which living is situated at different levels. Globalization determines the negotiation of the cultural experience to be the center of the interventional strategies upon some other areas of connection: economical, political, ecological. Cultural changes materialize because of the need of increasing the understanding level of our own life and of the world we living in. Nowadays, the cultural changes may be seen in the paradigm of globalization.

<sup>18</sup> Solomon Marcus, *Paradigme universale*, Editura „Paralela 45“, Pitești, 2005, p.55

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, p.56

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, p.78

<sup>21</sup> J. Tomlinson, *op.cit.*, p.43

### 3. 1. The development of the deterritorialized human experience

For most of the people, the *deterritorialization* as a cultural experience does not imply a real physical mobility. Telephone, computer and TV set form a connecting proximity of the human beings who live in different places. Nowadays, physical bordered places are less important as long as information can easily be sent to long distances. “*The evolution of the media decreased the importance of physical presence for the way in which we live the people and events experience [...] Where you live is less important than what you know or live. Electronic media have modified the importance of time and space for the social interaction.*”<sup>22</sup> This media experience that we have access to, gets to involve us in other peoples’ lives, in foreign social and cultural events and contexts, not only in an informational way, but also in a moral and emotional one.

From our point of view, globalization is neither good nor bad, it does not seem dangerous, but, in the same time, not an ideal world. All these characteristics get to describe the attitudinal and behavioral features, the actions and projects of those involved in this complex process, which is compulsory in nowadays society.

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<sup>22</sup> Joshua Meyrowitz, *No Sense of Place: The impact of electronic media*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1985, pp. VII-VIII